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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2489  
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
AMEMBASSY QUITO  
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
AMEMBASSY LIMA  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN  
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
USIA WASHDC 2006  
DIA WASHDC  
CIA WASHDC  
NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003637

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: HUGO CHAVEZ WINS IN A LANDSLIDE

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS WON THE DECEMBER 6 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN A LANDSLIDE, BESTING HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER 56 PERCENT TO 39 PERCENT. WITH MORE THAN 80 PERCENT OF THE VOTE COUNTED, THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE) DECLARED CHAVEZ THE WINNER LESS THAN THREE HOURS AFTER THE POLLS HAD CLOSED. THESE ELECTIONS, A MODEL OF DECORUM AND ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY, BROUGHT APPROXIMATELY SEVENTY PERCENT OF VENEZUELA'S ELECTORATE TO THE POLLS IN A PEACEFUL AND SUCCESSFUL VOTE OBSERVED BY MORE THAN THREE HUNDRED INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS. DEFEATED CANDIDATE SALAS ROMER, IN A GRACIOUS AND STATESMANLIKE CONCESSION SPEECH, PROMISED TO WORK WITH CHAVEZ TO ACHIEVE THE "RADICAL CHANGE" NECESSARY TO REFORM VENEZUELA'S PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, MAKE ITS DEMOCRACY MORE REPRESENTATIVE, AND IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF ITS CITIZENS. CHAVEZ, FOR HIS PART, DECLARED THAT HE HAD "NO POLITICAL ENEMIES," AND REACHED OUT TO HIS ELECTORAL ADVERSARIES, DECLARING THAT THROUGH RECONCILIATION VENEZUELA CAN OVERCOME ITS DIVISIONS AND CONFRONT ITS MAJOR CHALLENGES. END SUMMARY.

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CHAVEZ BY A LANDSLIDE  
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¶2. HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS WAS PRONOUNCED THE WINNER OF THE DECEMBER 6 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS BY THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE) LESS THAN THREE HOURS AFTER THE POLLS CLOSED. THE LIGHTENING VOTE COUNT, FACILITATED BY SUCCESSFUL AUTOMATION OF THE VOTING PROCESS, HAD TABULATED MORE THAN EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE VOTE FROM MORE THAN SEVENTY PERCENT OF THE POLLING STATIONS, GIVING CHAVEZ A PROJECTED VICTORY OVER HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER BY A MARGIN OF 17 PERCENTAGE POINTS (56 PERCENT TO 39 PERCENT). THIS IS THE LARGEST MARGIN OF VICTORY IN A VENEZUELAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SINCE 1983, WHEN JAIME LUSINCHI BEAT RAFAEL CALDERA BY 57 PERCENT TO 34 PERCENT.

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A GOOD, CLEAN ELECTION  
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¶3. THE DECEMBER 6 VOTE WAS CHARACTERIZED BY DECORUM AND ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY. IN CONTRAST TO THE NOVEMBER 8 REGIONAL ELECTIONS, QUICK VOTING WAS FACILITATED BY PUNCTUAL OPENING OF THE VOTING CENTERS, IMPROVED ORGANIZATION, AND A SIMPLER BALLOT. ALTHOUGH INITIAL ESTIMATES OF VOTER TURNOUT WERE A FULL 15 PERCENT HIGHER THAN THE NOVEMBER 8 VOTE (70 PERCENT TODAY; 55 PERCENT NOVEMBER 8), VOTERS MOVED THROUGH THE VOTING CENTERS QUICKLY AND EASILY, ONLY RARELY EXPERIENCING LONG LINES OR WAITS. THE INFORMAL CONSENSUS OF THE NEARLY 300 INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS INVITED TO WATCH THE ELECTIONS WAS THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE WELL RUN AND WELL RECEIVED. AGAIN, OBSERVERS FROM ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE CARTER CENTER, THE INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE, THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE, THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS, THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES, AND OVER FORTY MEMBERS OF THIS EMBASSY, NOTED THE DETERMINATION OF VENEZUELAN

VOTERS TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE AND TO EXPRESS THEIR DESIRE FOR SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL CHANGE THROUGH THE ELECTORAL AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES.

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SALAS CONCEDES  
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14. FOLLOWING THE PRONOUNCEMENT OF THE CNE DECLARING CHAVEZ THE PROJECTED WINNER OF THE ELECTIONS, CANDIDATE HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER OFFICIALLY CONCEDED VICTORY TO HUGO CHAVEZ. SALAS ROMER, IN A GRACIOUS AND STATESMANLIKE FASHION, CONGRATULATED CHAVEZ FOR HIS VICTORY, AND PROMISED TO WORK WITH CHAVEZ TO ACHIEVE THE "RADICAL CHANGE" WHICH SO MANY VENEZUELANAS WANT AND DEMAND FROM THEIR POLITICAL LEADERS. SALAS ROMER SAID HE WOULD NOT RETIRE FROM POLITICS, BUT INSTEAD WOULD IMMERSE HIMSELF EVEN DEEPER IN THE EFFORT TO REFORM VENEZUELA'S PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, MAKE ITS DEMOCRACY MORE REPRESENTATIVE, AND IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF ITS CITIZENS. HE PUT CHAVEZ ON NOTICE THAT HE AND HIS SUPPORTERS WOULD HOLD HIM TO HIS WORD TO AFFECT RADICAL CHANGE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF DEMOCRACY AND INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY.

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CHAVEZ REACHES OUT TO HIS ADVERSARIES  
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15. CHAVEZ, IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CNE'S PRONOUNCEMENT, SAID HE HAD NO "POLITICAL ENEMIES" AND CALLED ON HIS ELECTORAL ADVERSARIES TO WORK WITH HIM TO CONSTRUCT A NEW VENEZUELA. HE REACHED OUT TO HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER AND HIS PARTY, PROYECTO VENEZUELA, ALONG WITH THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION PARTY (AD), THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (COPEI), AND OTHERS, TO JOIN HIM IN HIS ATTACK ON THE CORRUPTION, IMPUNITY, AND POOR MANAGEMENT WHICH HAVE RENDERED THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT WEAK, INEFFECTIVE, AND DESPISED. CHAVEZ SAID IT WAS TIME TO "FORGIVE AND FORGET" AND THAT ONLY THROUGH RECONCILIATION COULD VENEZUELA FIND THE UNITY TO CONFRONT ITS MAJOR CHALLENGES.

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AND TO THE MILITARY  
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16. CHAVEZ, DURING THE INTERVIEW, SAID HE HAD REQUESTED THE GOV TO BRING HOME FROM WASHINGTON GENERAL RAUL SALAZAR SO THAT SALAZAR COULD PREPARE TO BECOME CHAVEZ'S MINISTER OF DEFENSE. CHAVEZ ALSO PRAISED THE CURRENT MILITARY HIGH COMMAND FOR ITS STRONG, INSTITUTIONAL ROLE DURING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. DEFENSE MINISTER ADMIRAL TITO RINCON BRAVO, FOLLOWING THE CNE PRONOUNCEMENT, TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE ARMED FORCES WOULD CONTINUE ITS ROLE AS GUARANTOR OF THE CONSTITUTION AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND WOULD FULLY SUPPORT THE RESULTS OF THE ELECTIONS.

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COMMENT  
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17. WE STILL AWAIT CHAVEZ'S FIRST MAJOR PRONOUNCEMENTS AS PRESIDENT-ELECT, WHICH WILL COME LATER THIS EVENING. HOWEVER, WE KNOW THAT CHAVEZ'S ELECTION MARKS AN HISTORIC MILESTONE IN VENEZUELAN POLITICAL HISTORY, AND WILL PRESENT THIS COUNTRY NEW AND SPECIAL CHALLENGES IN THE MONTHS TO COME. THE PEACEFUL VOTE AND THE CELEBRATIONS WHICH FOLLOWED THE PRONOUNCEMENT OF CHAVEZ'S VICTORY--WHICH HAVE NOT FEATURED ANY KIND OF VIOLENCE OR DISTURBANCE--ARE A TRIBUTE TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CNE, THE PREPARATION OF THE VENEZUELAN SECURITY FORCES CHARGED WITH MAINTAINING PUBLIC ORDER, AND THE MATURITY OF THE VENEZUELAN VOTER. IN THIS REGARD, THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF DECEMBER 6, LIKE THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS OF NOVEMBER 8, WERE A VICTORY FOR VENEZUELAN DEMOCRACY AS MUCH AS FOR ANY SINGLE CANDIDATE.

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